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The Popular Image of Ivan the Terrible

MAUREEN PERRIE

It is a curious paradox that Ivan the Terrible, whose name in written history is synonymous with arbitrary cruelty and despotism, should be the first historical figure to feature as a 'good' tsar in Russian folklore. The folklore tradition which identified certain tsars as popular heroes, the champions of the people against their social oppressors, the landowners and officials, was an aspect of the 'monarchist' political outlook of the Russian people, which survived, in one form or another, at least until the revolution of 1905.¹ The object of this article is to explore the origins of the popular image of the tsar, and to put forward an explanation for its emergence.

Interesting evidence of a positive popular image of Ivan IV in the seventeenth century is provided by the tales which were collected, and published in 1671, by Dr Samuel Collins, the Englishman who was court physician to Tsar Aleksey Mikhaylovich in the 1660s.² Chapter 12 of Collins's book is devoted entirely to Ivan IV, and contains a number of tales about the tsar which were evidently current in Moscow in the mid-seventeenth century.³ Some of these are simply anecdotes with little more than curiosity value, but others are designed to illustrate his general statement that 'The people loved him [Ivan] very well, for he treated them kindly, but chastised his boyars'.⁴ These tales, which I shall number (1) to (5) for ease of reference, are as follows:

- (1) He had a staff with a very sharp spike in the end thereof, which in the discourse he would strike through his boyars' feet, and if they could bear it without any flinching, he would highly prefer them.⁵

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¹ After work on this article had been completed, Daniel Field published a stimulating book in which some evidence of the existence of 'popular monarchism' in the second half of the nineteenth century is critically examined: *Rebels in the Name of the Tsar*, Boston, 1976.

² Samuel Collins, *The Present State of Russia, in a Letter to a Friend at London*, London, 1671. For an account of this work, see Leo Loewenson, 'The Works of Robert Boyle and "The Present State of Russia" by Samuel Collins' (*The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. xxxiii, London, 1954-55, pp. 470-85).

³ Loewenson (p. 480 n.) estimates that this chapter was written 'around 1661'.

⁴ Collins, p. 47. The spelling and punctuation of sixteenth and seventeenth-century English have been modernized in the quotations, and a modern transliteration of the Russian terms has been added in square brackets.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48. This would appear to be the first recorded reference to this characteristic habit of Ivan's. The source for the story, immortalized by Karamzin and other

(2) Another vayod [*voyevoda*] had taken a goose for a bribe stuffed full of ducats, and being complained of, he took no notice of him, till one day passing through the Posharr [*Pozhar*] (an open place like Smithfield, where execution was used to be done) he commanded the hangman to cut off his arms and his legs; and at every blow the hangman asked him whether goose was good meat.⁶

(3) When Ivan went his progress, many of the commons as well as gentry presented him with fine presents. A good honest bast-shoemaker, who made shoes of bast for a copeak [*kopeyka*] a pair, consults with his wife what to present his Majesty. Says she, a pair of fine lopkyes [*lapotki*], or shoes of bast. That is no rarity, quoth he; but we have a huge great turnip in the garden, we'll give him that, and a pair of lopkyes also. Thus they did; and the Emperor took the present so kindly, that he made all his nobility buy lopkyes of the fellow at five shillings a pair, and he wore one pair himself. This put the man in stock, whereby he began to drive a trade, and in time grew so considerable, that he left a great estate behind him . . . A gentleman seeing him so well paid for his turnip, made account by the rule of proportion to get a great reward for a brave horse; but the Emperor, suspecting his design, gave him nothing but the great turnip, for which he was both abashed and laughed at.⁷

(4) Ivan in a disguise sought a lodging in a village nigh the city. None would let him in but a poor man whose wife was then in travail, and delivered whilst he was there. Away he went before day, and told the man he would bring him some godfathers next day. Accordingly he and many of his nobility came and gave the poor fellow a good largess, and burned all the houses in the village but his, exhorting them to charity, and telling them, because they refused to admit strangers into their houses, they should be forced so seek their fortunes, and try how good it was to lie out of doors in the winter.⁸

(5) Sometimes he would associate with thieves in a disguise, and once he advised them to rob the Exchequer; for (says he) I know the way to it, but one of the fellows up with his fist, and struck him a

nineteenth-century Russian historians, that Ivan impaled the foot of Vas'ka Shibanov whilst the latter read aloud to the Tsar the first letter of his master, Prince Kurbsky, is the *Latukhinskaya stepennaya kniga*, probably compiled by the monk Tikhon in 1677–78. This version conflicts with the account of Shibanov's encounter with the Tsar in the Alexander Nevsky chronicle (*Prodolzheniye Aleksandro-Neuskoy letopisi*, in *Polnoye sobraniye russkikh letopisey* (hereafter *PSRL*), vol. xxix, Moscow, 1965, p. 334). For the *Latukhinskaya stepennaya kniga*, see V. S. Ikonnikov, *Opyt russkoy istoriografii*, 1891–1908 (reprinted Osnabruck, 1966), vol. II, book 2, pp. 1338–42. In the folksong about 'Ivan the Terrible and his son', the victim whose foot is spiked is Nikita Romanovich. The earliest recorded version of this song is that sent by P. A. Demidov to the historian F. Müller (G.-F. Müller) in 1768, and first published in the 'Kirsha Danilov' collection in 1804. See *Drevniye rossiyskiye stikhotvoreniya, sobrannyye Kirsheyu Danilovym*, ed. A. P. Yevgen'yeva and B. N. Putilov, Moscow and Leningrad, 1958, pp. 225, 529–31, 624.

⁶ Collins, p. 49.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

hearty good blow on the face, saying, Thou rogue, wilt thou offer to rob his Majesty who is so good to us; let us go rob such a rich boyar who has cozened his Majesty of vast sums. At this Ivan was well pleased, and at parting changed caps with the fellow, and bid him meet him next morning in the dvaretz [*dvorets*] (a place in the court where the Emperor used often to pass by) and there (said he) I will bring thee to a good cup of aqua-vitae and mead. The thief came accordingly, and being discovered by his Majesty, was called up, admonished to steal no more, preferred in court, and served for a discoverer of thieves.⁹

In these tales, Ivan appears as the dispenser of rough justice to his subjects. The villains are the boyars and *voyevody* — they are acquisitive, take bribes and cheat the treasury; the representatives of the common people, on the other hand, are good, honest, generous and charitable. The tsar deals with these groups according to their deserts: the popular heroes (the bast-shoemaker, the poor father, the loyal thief) are rewarded by the tsar with 'preferment', while the villains are cruelly punished. The socio-political content of Collins's tales, with their depiction of the inter-relationships of the tsar, the boyars and the common people, is very similar to that of the folklore which we know from the later Russian records.¹⁰ It is clear, therefore, that the image of Ivan as a 'good' tsar had developed within a century of his death, and that his image had already attracted some universal folklore themes associated with popular monarchy (e.g., nos. 3, 4 and 5).¹¹

These tales collected by Collins are the earliest recorded evidence of the image of Ivan IV as a just, 'popular' tsar which appears in the numerous cycles of historical songs and legends of which the earliest recorded Russian versions date only from the late eighteenth century. But Collins's tales are evidence only of the existence of such an image in the seventeenth century. The question of the popular image of the tsar in the sixteenth century is a separate issue which must be examined separately.

There is considerable debate among folklorists as to how far the historical songs and legends about Ivan IV can be considered to reflect popular sixteenth-century attitudes towards the tsar, rather

⁹ Ibid., pp. 52–53.

¹⁰ For an analysis of the social content of the historical songs about Ivan, see V. K. Sokolova, *Russkiye istoricheskiye pesni XVI–XVII vv.* (hereafter Sokolova, *Pesni*), Moscow, 1960, pp. 79–80; and B. N. Putilov's introduction to *Istoricheskiye pesni XIII–XVIII vv.*, Moscow, 1960, p. 30. For the legends, see V. K. Sokolova, *Russkiye istoricheskiye predaniya* (hereafter Sokolova, *Predaniya*), Moscow, 1970, pp. 49–64, 278–79.

¹¹ For the universal folk-themes associated with Ivan, see Sokolova, *Predaniya*, pp. 50, 55–60, 279. For references to other versions of 'Ivan the Terrible and the bast-shoemaker' (Collins no. 3) and 'Ivan the Terrible and the thief' (Collins no. 5) see N. V. Novikov's commentary to Collins's versions of these tales in *Russkiye skazki v rannikh zapisyakh i publikatsiyakh (XVI–XVIII vv.)*, Leningrad, 1971, p. 264.

than a retrospective idealization.¹² We know that some songs about the Time of Troubles are of contemporary composition, and we know that songs about Ivan IV existed in his lifetime;¹³ but we cannot be sure that the songs relating to the capture of Kazan' and Astrakhan' which we know in versions dating from the eighteenth century were those which the tsar sang at the wedding of Mariya Vladimirovna to the Danish Prince Magnus in 1573. Stief in fact considers it inherently improbable that the eighteenth-century versions of these songs, in which the hero is not the tsar but a young gunner, and the image presented of the tsar is rather an unflattering one, could have been the eulogies and paeans to which writers such as Olearius referred.¹⁴

A major obstacle to our acceptance of the positive folklore image of Ivan as that of contemporaries is its sharp contrast with the negative image of Ivan as a cruel and bloodthirsty tyrant which is presented by Western and Russian contemporaries.¹⁵ These, admittedly, were not 'popular' images, although they can be found in some regional versions of the folklore.¹⁶ But they also tally with what we know from independent historical evidence of the plight of the lower classes in Russian society during Ivan's reign.¹⁷ If the contemporary popular image of Ivan was indeed a positive one, it can hardly have been a true reflection of reality. It is probably for this reason that some scholars are reluctant to accept the 'just tsar' image of Ivan as that of contemporaries, but consider it to be a retrospective view, perhaps from the standpoint of the political and social chaos which followed the end of the dynasty with the death of Tsar Feodor Ivanovich in 1598. Thus the Soviet scholar Chistov argues that it was necessary for two or three decades to have elapsed since the horrors of the *oprichnina* before a positive image could have been created of Dimitry as Ivan's son and hence the natural continuer of his struggle against the boyars.¹⁸ A similar view was put forward by the Englishman Samuel Purchas. Writing in a work first published in 1625, with a knowledge of the Time of Troubles, Purchas put

¹² For the different views on this issue, see Sokolova, *Pesni*, pp. 11–13, and Putilov's introduction to *Istoricheskiye pesni* . . . , pp. 13–14.

¹³ For the evidence of this, see Sokolova, *Pesni*, pp. 10, 310; and Carl Stief, *Studies in the Russian Historical Song*, Copenhagen, 1953, p. 228.

¹⁴ Stief, *op. cit.*, pp. 228–29.

¹⁵ For a review of contemporary sources hostile to Ivan, see A. A. Zimin, *Oprichnina Ivana Groznogo*, Moscow, 1964, pp. 72–80.

¹⁶ Especially in the legends from the regions of Novgorod and Pskov, where they clearly reflect the sack of Novgorod by Ivan in 1570. See Sokolova, *Predaniya*, pp. 60–64.

¹⁷ For an account of the peasantry in the second half of the sixteenth century, with an extensive bibliography, see Richard Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy*, Chicago, 1971, pp. 93–103.

¹⁸ K. V. Chistov, *Russkiye narodnyye sotsial'no-utopicheskiye legendy XVII–XIX vv.*, Moscow, 1967, pp. 29–30.

forward three explanations for the existence of a positive image of Ivan, in spite of his cruelties:

Yea, his memory is savoury still to the Russians, which (either of their servile disposition needing such a bridle and whip, or for his long and prosperous reign, *or out of distaste for later tragedies*) hold him in little less reputation (as some have out of their experience instructed me) than a saint.¹⁹

Of the Soviet scholars who believe that the later folklore image does accurately reflect contemporary sixteenth-century attitudes towards Ivan, V. K. Sokolova has put forward the most persuasive case.²⁰ She argues that Ivan's struggle against the boyars created his popular image as a just and ideal tsar:

For the broad masses the boyars were their fundamental class enemies, their direct oppressors, and therefore the Tsar, who restricted the arbitrary powers of the feudal lords and cruelly punished them, was perceived as the ally and defender of the people.²¹

Elsewhere Sokolova cites as evidence of a contemporary popular image of Ivan the chronicle account of the introduction of the *oprichnina*, in which the merchants and citizens of Moscow responded to Ivan's threatened abdication by begging him 'not to leave the country and abandon them to be ravened by the wolves, but to deliver them from the hands of the mighty'.²² Sokolova notes, however, that this popular image of Ivan was essentially illusory, since his policies were directed at least as much against the interests of the masses as against those of the boyars.²³ While I am basically in agreement with Sokolova's approach to the problem, I believe that there is also another element, previously unremarked by historians, which may have contributed to the formation of a positive popular image of Ivan IV. There is some evidence to suggest that

¹⁹ Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus, or Purchas his Pilgrimes*, vol. xiv, Glasgow, 1906, p. 113. My italics.

²⁰ She at least attempts to provide positive arguments, whereas Putilov, for example, bases his views on the somewhat negative reasoning that there is no evidence to show that later versions of historical songs do *not* correspond to the lost sixteenth-century originals: 'We have no reason to doubt that the great majority of the themes of the songs familiar to us can be directly traced back to the period with which their content is linked, and that no qualitative changes have taken place in them' (*Istoricheskiye pesni* . . . , p. 14).

²¹ Sokolova, *Pesni*, p. 79.

²² *Prodolzheniye Aleksandro-Neuskoy letopisi*, in *PSRL*, vol. xxix, p. 343. Sokolova (*Predaniya*, p. 51) cites — inaccurately — the version of this chronicle published as *Dopolneniya k Nikonovskoy letopisi*, in *PSRL*, vol. xiii, 2nd half, St Petersburg, 1906, p. 393.

²³ 'Ivan the Terrible, who consistently pursued a policy of peasant enslavement, became the exemplar of the just and ideal tsar in popular poetry. It was probably at this time that the tsarist illusions, which were preserved for so long by the Russian people, began to form' (Sokolova, *Pesni*, p. 79). Elsewhere, however (*ibid.*, pp. 324–25), Sokolova seems to be supporting the rather more dubious argument that the creation of a positive popular image of Ivan IV reflected a recognition on the part of the masses that his actions were 'historically progressive'.

Ivan himself sought to project an image of the tsar as the ally of the people against their social oppressors, the 'traitor-boyars'.

The first piece of evidence comes from the chronicle passage previously cited, concerning the introduction of the *oprichnina*. In December 1564 Ivan, together with his family and courtiers and a vast hoard of the royal treasure, left Moscow, providing no explanation of his unprecedented departure. A month later, on 3 January 1565, he sent two messages from Aleksandrova Sloboda to the Metropolitan Afanasy in Moscow, announcing his decision to abdicate because of the treason of the boyars, *voyevody* and officials. The significance of these messages lies not only in the fact that the first accused the boyars, all the upper military and civil service classes and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, of treason, while the second message specifically excluded the '*gosti* and merchants and all the Orthodox Christians of the city of Moscow' from his anger and disfavour, but also in the definitions of treason which the first message provides. Ivan accused his boyars of both 'external' and 'internal' treason. The external treason consisted in their intrigues with the tsar's enemies, the Tatars, Lithuanians and Germans; the internal treason, significantly, consisted not only in their expropriation of state revenue and lands during Ivan's minority, but also in offences against the people: they 'caused much harm to the people, . . . they did not care for all the Orthodox Christians, . . . but they subjected the people to violence . . .'.²⁴ Ivan was here clearly bidding for the support of the citizens against the boyars, and in their reply the Muscovites not only called upon the tsar to defend them against 'the wolves' and 'the mighty', but also offered to help him to destroy their common enemies: 'and as for the evil-doers and traitors to the tsar, we will not support them, and will ourselves destroy them'.²⁵

Nor, despite the exceptional circumstances of the abdication crisis, was this a unique instance of Ivan's use of demagogic appeals to the populace to gain support for his campaign against the boyars. In this context, it is instructive to note that Ivan's message of January 1565 includes a reference to the *kormleniye* system as an example of the abuses of the people perpetrated by the boyars.²⁶ Ivan's *gramoty* of 1555 which abolished the *kormleniye* system had referred specifically to such abuses as a major motive for the reform: the many complaints of the people against the arbitrary rule of the *kormlenshchiki*, Ivan said, had led him to abolish the system, 'since we had pity on the

²⁴ *Prodolzheniye Aleksandro-Neuskoy letopisi*, in *PSRL*, vol. xxix, p. 342.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

peasants for the great damages and losses they had suffered'.²⁷ Even the vocabulary of the 1565 message is an echo of the *gramoty* of 1555 (*lyudem mnogiye ubytki delali; chinyat im prodazhi i ubytki velikiye*). The reference to *kormleniye* in his message of January 1565 may be seen as evidence that Ivan was seeking to present the introduction of the *oprichnina* as a continuation of the policy of curtailing the power of the boyars which had begun in the earlier reform period. Whatever the real aim of his policies, he was at least trying to win the support of the common people for his reforms, by claiming that he had their interests at heart.²⁸ And the response of the citizens of Moscow to Ivan's threatened abdication suggests that he was on the whole successful in his projection of this image.

Another piece of evidence concerning Ivan's use of demagogic devices to gain popular support for his policies can be found in Giles Fletcher's *Of the Russe Commonwealth*. In this account, Fletcher describes how the tsars increased their revenues:

To prevent no extortions, exactions, or briberies whatsoever, done upon the commons by their dukes, diacks [*d'yaki*] or other officers in their provinces: but to suffer them to go on until their time be expired, and to suck themselves full. Then to call them to the pravevsh [*pravezh*] (or whip) for their behaviour, and to beat out of them all, or the most part of the booty, (as the honey from the bee), which they have wrung from the commons, and to turn it into the Emperor's treasury, but never anything back again to the right owners, how great or evident soever the injury be.²⁹

Fletcher continues his list of the 'means used to draw the wealth of the land into the Emperor's treasury':³⁰

To make of these officers (that have robbed their people) sometimes a public example, if any be more notorious than the rest: *that the Emperor may seem to mislike the oppression done to his people, and transfer the fault to his ill officers.*

²⁷ *Akty, sobrannyye v bibliotekakh i arkhivakh Rossiyskoy Imperii arkhograficheskoyu ekspeditsiyeyu Imperatorskoy Akademii Nauk*, vol. 1, St Petersburg, 1836, no. 242, p. 262; no. 243, p. 264.

²⁸ Recent studies argue that Ivan was trying to gain political support from at least the upper strata of the peasants and townsmen for the administrative reforms of the 1550s, and of the townsmen for the *oprichnina* reform. Ultimately, however, the administrative reforms were motivated by concern for the fiscal interests of the state rather than for the welfare of the ordinary people. The aims of the *oprichnina* reform are still a subject of considerable historical controversy. See A. A. Zimin, *Reformy Ivana Groznogo; ocherki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoy i politicheskoy istorii Rossii sere diny XVI v.*, Moscow, 1960, pp. 397-401, 422-36; N. Ye. Nosov, *Stanovleniye soslovno-predstavitel'nykh uchrezhdeniy v Rossii: izyskaniya o zemskoy reforme Ivana Groznogo*, Leningrad, 1969, pp. 367-85; P. A. Sadikov, *Ocherki po istorii oprichniny*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1950, pp. 59-61; Zimin, *Oprichnina* . . . , p. 131; B. Nørretranders, *The Shaping of Czardom under Ivan Groznyj*, Copenhagen, 1964, reprinted 1971, pp. 150, 179.

²⁹ Giles Fletcher, *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, London, 1591; facsimile edn, introduced by R. Pipes, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966, f. 41 v.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 41 v.

As among divers others, was done by the late Emperor Ivan Vasilowich [Vasil'yevich] to a diack in one of his provinces: that (besides many other extortions and briberies) had taken a goose ready dressed full of money. The man was brought to the market place in Moscow. The Emperor himself present made an oration. These good people are they that would eat you up like bread, etc. Then asked he his polachies [*palachi*] or executioners, who could cut up a goose, and commanded one of them first to cut off his legs about the midst of the shin, then his arms above his elbows (asking him still if goose flesh were good meat), in the end to chop off his head: that he might have the right fashion of a goose ready dressed. This might seem to have been a tolerable piece of justice (as justice goeth in Russia) *except his subtle end to cover his own oppressions*.³¹

This anecdote is of interest for several reasons. Firstly, Fletcher's view of Ivan's cynical use of 'demagogic' or 'populist' devices to gain popular support for measures which were ultimately in the interests of the state rather than the common people corresponds closely to the most recent interpretations of Ivan's reforms by Soviet historians.³² Secondly, the tale of the 'golden goose', which Fletcher uses to illustrate his view, is identical to the anecdote related by Collins (no. 2 above) nearly a century later, as part of his collection of tales about Ivan IV as a 'just tsar'. Thus Fletcher's recording of this tale provides a link between the seventeenth-century source and the sixteenth-century reality it purports to depict.³³ And finally, it is interesting to note that the earliest manuscript version of Fletcher's work identifies the 'diack' in the tale of the 'golden goose' as I. M. Viskovaty;³⁴ and indeed, even without this evidence, the peculiarly gruesome method of execution — even by Ivan's standards — recalls the accounts of Viskovaty's execution in 1570 provided by foreign contemporaries such as Schlichting. However, it is equally clear from these sources that Viskovaty was executed, not for extortion and bribetaking, as Fletcher suggests, but on charges of treasonous links with foreign monarchs.³⁵ If we can take Fletcher's

³¹ *Ibid.*, f. 42. My italics.

³² Zimin, *Reformy* . . . , pp. 201, 422–36. Nosov describes the 'love of the peasants' expressed in Ivan's *gramoty* of 1555–56 as 'clear political demagoguery' (p. 378).

³³ Another link between Collins and Fletcher is the tale of the '*kolpak* of fleas'. In Collins, this is simply an anecdote: 'He [Ivan] once sent to Vologda for a colpack of fleas, and because they could not bring him full measure, he fined them' (p. 48). In Fletcher, too, it is little more than an anecdote, but presented as an example of the 'very plain, and yet strange cavillations' (f. 44 v.) used by Ivan to extract revenue from his subjects: 'Again he sent to the city of Moscow to provide for him a colpack, or measure full of live fleas for a medicine. They returned answer that the thing was impossible. And if they could get them, yet they could not measure them for leaping out. Whereupon he praved, or beat out of their shins 7,000 roubles for a mulct' (f. 45).

³⁴ L. E. Berry, ed., *The English Works of Giles Fletcher, the Elder*, Madison, 1964, p. 498.

³⁵ For Viskovaty's execution, see Zimin, *Oprichnina* . . . , pp. 436–49. See also N. Andreyev, 'Interpolations in the 16th-century Muscovite Chronicles' (*The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. xxxv, 1955–56, pp. 105–6).

tale as the reflection of a belief current in Moscow in the late 1580s that Viskovaty (and possibly also other high-ranking victims of the *oprichnina* terror) had been executed not for external treason, but for their exploitation of the people,³⁶ this would be further evidence of the success of Ivan's attempt to present his campaign against the boyars as a crusade against oppression in which the tsar was the defender of the interests of the common people.

It may be objected at this point that such evidence as has been adduced so far relates mainly to the formation of the 'just tsar' image among the townspeople, and even there among the upper and middle strata — the merchants and craftsmen — whereas by the Time of Troubles 'popular monarchism', in the form of support for pretenders, was most evident among the lower orders — the slaves (*khology*), peasants and Cossacks. It is of course possible that these middle strata acted as intermediaries between the tsar and the lower classes, and thus channelled their view of the monarchy downwards. But there was a common practice in late sixteenth-century Russia which may have encouraged even the humblest classes to view the tsar as their ally against their social enemies. This was the practice of political denunciations of superiors by inferiors, a practice which was officially encouraged by successive tsars. Indeed, the offer by the citizens of Moscow in January 1565 to destroy traitors to the tsar may have been an oblique reference to denunciations.

Both Horsey and Fletcher mention denunciations for treason as a device employed by Ivan in his campaign against the boyars. Horsey states that Ivan

still did discover their plots and treasons, by ennobling and countenancing all the rascalliest and desperate soldiers he could pick out, to affront the chief nobility.³⁷

And Fletcher tells us that in his attempts to weaken the old aristocracy, Ivan

used to set on the inferiors, to prefer or equal themselves to those that were accounted to be of the nobler houses. Where he made his advantage of their malice and contentions, the one against the other, by receiving devised matter, and accusations of secret practice and conspiracies to be intended against his person, and state.³⁸

³⁶ Although Horsey claimed to have been Fletcher's main source, Fletcher himself knew Russian, and was able to converse with ordinary Russians, either directly or through an interpreter, in the course of his visit in 1588–89. See Pipes's introduction to the facsimile edition, pp. 23–24.

³⁷ Sir Jerome Horsey, 'Travels, Employments, Services and Negotiations, Observed and Written with his own Hand', in E. A. Bond, ed., *Russia at the Close of the Sixteenth Century*, London, 1856, p. 163.

³⁸ Fletcher, *op. cit.*, f. 25.

The practice of slaves making political denunciations against their masters, presumably in the hope of personal gain, was apparently quite widespread in Ivan's reign. It was abolished only in 1582, in response to a petition to the tsar from two of his boyars,³⁹ by an act which the Soviet historian Skrynnikov interprets as a symptom of a tempering of the terror, and the partial rehabilitation of the victims of the *oprichnina* in the period of remorse in Ivan's last years, following his murder of his heir, the Tsarevich Ivan Ivanovich.⁴⁰

The practice of encouraging slaves to denounce their masters for treason was revived by Boris Godunov in the early years of Feodor's reign, as a device to aid him in the power struggle against the rival aristocratic families. The chronicle tells us that in 1586 Boris incited the slaves (*lyudi*) of the Shuysky family to denounce their masters.⁴¹ Boris resorted to this device again in the opening years of his own reign, the objects of political denunciations by their slaves at this time including the Romanovs. The slaves who made such denunciations were generously rewarded by the tsar for their loyalty. One Voika, the slave (*chelovek*) of Prince Fyodor Sherstunov, was granted a *pomest'ye* for his services, and promoted to the rank of an urban *syn boyarskiy*. The promise of similar rewards, according to the chronicle, inspired whole groups of five or six men to conspire together to accuse their masters of treason and to bear false witness against them. Slaves who refused to denounce their masters were tortured and punished, whereas the accusers were, like Voika, rewarded, some with *pomest'ya*, and some with money payments.⁴²

Thus we have clear evidence that in the second half of the sixteenth century it was already well established practice that the tsar should seek to exploit in his own political interest conflicts between individual slaves and their masters. Such campaigns of denunciation probably reinforced in the minds of the lower classes the identification of their social enemies as the political enemies of the tsar. Of course, it was dangerous and ultimately counter-productive for the tsars to create such an idea, as the Time of Troubles was to demonstrate. It was only a short step from the idea of the 'traitor-boyars' to the idea of the 'false tsar'; and Boris Godunov's rewarding of Voika with an estate for denouncing his master as a traitor was equally close to Bolotnikov's promises of *boyarstvo* to the slaves in Moscow who rose against their masters who had betrayed 'Tsar Dimitry'.

³⁹ 'Ukazy, sudebniku v dopolneniye', in V. N. Tatishchev, *Istoriya rossiyskaya*, vol. VII, Leningrad, 1968, pp. 362-65.

⁴⁰ R. G. Skrynnikov, 'Politicheskaya bor'ba v nachale pravleniya Borisa Godunova' (*Istoriya SSSR*, no. 2, Moscow, 1975, pp. 48-49).

⁴¹ *Novyy letopisets*, in *PSRL*, vol. XIV, 1st half, St Petersburg, 1910, pp. 36-37.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

But if popular monarchism could be such an ambivalent phenomenon, why should Ivan IV have sought to promote this ideology? The short answer may be that he simply did not realize the dangers. But, at a deeper level, his policy of centralization of the power of the state obliged him to seek political support from social groups other than the traditional ruling class. Although the absolutist state which was the eventual outcome of policies initiated by Ivan was if anything more oppressive of the masses than the older Muscovite state, its relative independence from the class of serf-owners enabled subsequent tsars to continue to pose as defenders of the people against exploitation, and thus to reinforce the 'tsarist illusions' of the Russian peasantry.⁴³

The folklore image of Ivan IV as a good tsar is part of the broader phenomenon of 'popular monarchism' in Russian history. 'Popular monarchism', of course, was not an exclusively Russian phenomenon, but has many parallels in other countries. In so far as it is a universal phenomenon, popular monarchism may be based in part upon the patriarchalism of pre-capitalist society, and of the peasantry in particular, and reinforced by religious ideas, such as those of medieval Christianity, which stress the quasi-sacerdotal nature of the ruler and his secular role as a supra-class arbiter and dispenser of justice.⁴⁴ Yet it seems that certain concrete historical situations are more conducive than others to manifestations of popular monarchism. One such situation may be the formation in the late medieval period of a centralized state with a degree of autonomy from the upper classes. In the reign of Ivan IV, the consolidation of the centralized state was accompanied by the tsar's savage persecution of those of his boyars whom he accused, apparently arbitrarily, of treason. This article has attempted to demonstrate that the popular image of Ivan as a 'just tsar' was not only formed on the basis of a passive interpretation by the people of

⁴³ Some of the contributors to the debate on the nature of Russian absolutism in the journal *Istoriya SSSR* in 1968–72 argued that the autocrats employed policies of 'monarchical democratism' or 'social demagoguery' to gain popular support. See for example A. Ya. Avrekhi, 'Russkii absolyutizm i yego rol' v utverzhdenii kapitalizma v Rossii' (1968, no. 2, p. 101); and A. N. Sakharov, 'Istoricheskiye faktory obrazovaniya russkogo absolyutizma' (1971, no. 1, p. 116).

⁴⁴ These are the standard Soviet explanations of popular monarchism. The repeated references to peasant 'patriarchalism' derive from Lenin. Makovsky has placed greater emphasis than other Soviet writers on Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*, in which Marx explained peasant support for Napoleon III in terms of the low level of class consciousness among the peasantry: 'They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, as an unlimited governmental power that protects them against the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. The political influence of the small-holding peasants, therefore, finds its final expression in the executive power subordinating society to itself' (K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Moscow, 1954, pp. 172–73). See D. P. Makovsky, *Pervaya krest'yanskaya voyna v Rossii*, Smolensk, 1967, pp. 463–91.

Ivan's struggle with the boyars, but that Ivan himself sought to create such an image by populist devices and appeals to the people for support. To use the terminology of the Soviet historians, the 'tsarist illusions' of the people corresponded to the 'social demagoguery' of the tsar. The two were mutually reinforcing, and their interaction may help to explain the peculiar strength of popular monarchist ideas in Russian history.